

MMUSD Board of Directors Meeting Minutes
January 21, 2010

Present: Judy Jones (Chair), George Till, Ken Wyman, Cliff Peterson, Ken Remsen, Jerome Mendicino, Michael Marks, Jeff Forward, Diane Kirson-Glitman, Carol Shallow, Bob Robbins, Linda Willmott, Marissa Giroux, Mike Weston, Mark Carbone, Jim Massingham, Jen Botzojorns, Lauren Wooden, Kevin Hamilton

Meeting was called to order at 7:34 p.m.

Public Comments

Fiona Murray read a written message to the board. She said she has been an Underhill resident for 30 years and her children went to MMU. She currently works in the MMU library. Ms. Murray said she had heard that her job could be eliminated in the next budget but that her position is now included in the FY '11 budget adopted for the March ballot. She wanted to thank the board for keeping her position.

Roots of Success

Lauren Wooden delivered a PowerPoint presentation on the "Roots of Success". The presentation was about schools in Vermont that beat the odds in getting students from low-income households to excel academically. They studied three K-6 schools in Vermont that have done remarkable things with students from low-income families. The factors that led to those students' success were high expectations, continuous improvement, and that every teacher took a sense of ownership in each kid. Also, community support was a factor at those schools as the community has a strong presence in the school buildings.

Ken Remsen said that the community involvement goes beyond a typical open house or booster clubs. Those schools make a real effort to communicate with the whole community, not just the parents. Remsen said that was likely a major reason why these schools reside in three of the highest unemployment rate towns in the state yet they have never voted down a school budget. Remsen added that their school boards are supportive but don't micromanage. They recognize that their role is strictly policy and budget and leave the educational roles up to the school leaders, said Remsen.

Ms. Wooden added that the three schools never use poverty as an excuse. The staff gives all students a vision for the future. Ms. Wooden said that the idea of the study was to give MMUSD a focus and direction on how to be comprehensive in the ways it addresses students, identifying students from low-income households as early as possible in elementary school. This way, said Wooden, no student is left behind. Mr. Remsen said they hope to perform a study on how Vermont high schools handle economically disadvantaged students at some point.

2010-11 Tuition Rate: The proposed tuition rates for the 2010-11 MMUSD school year are \$11,048 for Grades 5-6, \$10,735 for Grades 7-12, and \$30,653 for Mansfield Academy students. ****A MOTION to accept the tuition rates as proposed was SECONDED and approved by the Board.***

Vermont Healthy Kids Grant: The Board approved of a \$750 Vermont Healthy Kids Grant for Browns River Middle School in support of hosting a healthy-eating mini-contest and after-school physical activity program.

Volunteer Policy

****Cliff Peterson made a MOTION to bring the volunteer policy back for discussion. Motion carried.***

Mr. Peterson listed several concerns about the schools' volunteer policy. While he has no problem with performing background checks on work study students, volunteers should not be subjected to similar screening. There are lots of parents who volunteer at concerts and sporting events and there is no way the school can check them all, Peterson said. On the other hand, Peterson said, if something were to happen and a volunteer wasn't screened an attorney could say that the school didn't properly screen him or her. Mr. Peterson went on to say that required background checks for volunteers would damage MMUSD's sense of community. An alternative, Peterson said, would be to never leave a volunteer unsupervised, though that may have budget implications.

Judy Jones said this should be a discussion reserved for the policy committee. Jim Massingham said that sex-offender checks can be performed rather quickly just by looking it up on a web site. Background checks are more extensive.

George Till suggested that the policy should only apply to volunteers who spend "extended unsupervised time" with kids on things like overnight trips. He said the district should let administrators decide what should be considered extended unsupervised time with students. He added that it's too much to screen a volunteer who simply wants to carry water for a lacrosse game. Diane Kirson-Glitman said she will schedule a meeting for the Policy Committee to discuss the matter in further detail

Committee Reports

Strategic Planning Committee: Mr. Peterson said the committee is aiming to have a skeleton to the Board for the Feb. 25 meeting. The skeleton will not list goals, just issues that the committee deems important.

Student Council: Marissa Giroux said that exams are winding down and the winter ball is coming up. She also reported that the MMU Forensics Team finished first in its section.

Administrators' Reports

Mike Weston said that the MMU choral concert will be held Wednesday, Jan. 27. The 10th grade World History film festival is also next week.

Jen Botzojorns said that Senior Meeting is next week, when seniors will be able to order their caps and gowns. MMU is also performing a NEASC self-study, she said.

Mark Carbone said that 145 people attended Camel's Hump's annual open house on Jan. 20. He said there are 70-80 kids involved in this year's school play.

Kevin Hamilton said that Browns River will enter a team in the Penguin Plunge on Feb. 6. The school currently has 31 participants, but the goal is to get 45. Browns River is the second-leading fundraising team at the moment, Hamilton said. People can donate at penguinplunge.org. Mr. Hamilton said Browns River is establishing an administrators coffee house at Village Cup. The first topic will be 4th-to-5th grade transition. The school's spring production is the Wizard of Oz, which will show March 25-26.

Superintendent's Report

Mr. Massingham said there will be three board meetings in February on the 11th, 18th and 25th. He said that the state legislature is facing a huge deficit and may move the teachers' retirement fund to the education fund, which would impact the school tax rate. The legislature is also discussing whether to limit teacher retirement replacement at schools, replacing two retired teachers with only one, for example.

Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes and Warrants: The minutes for the Jan. 7 MMUSD School Board meeting were approved as written. The Board approved warrants in the amount of \$570,886.91.

Announcements and Other Business

Mr. Peterson said there was a parent email inquiring as to why MMUSD held school on Martin Luther King Day. Ms. Jones explained that the feeling was that discussing MLK's achievements in a classroom setting would be more meaningful than simply giving kids the day off.

Jeff Forward said that the district has \$2 million in construction projects in the works and that all of them go through the CESU business manager, Laura Nassau, in addition to the budget. That's more work that one person can do and I think the construction schedule has slipped, said Forward. Mr. Forward proposed that CESU should hire someone to help manage the construction projects going forward. That will get some of these projects back on track, he said. Mr. Massingham agreed that in the long run that would probably help. Linda Willmott asked where the funding for a construction project employee would come from. Mr. Massingham said they can come out of each project. It may be an easy tradeoff since the more work that goes into them the better the prices will be, he said.

****Mr. Forward made a MOTION to authorize Central office to hire a project manager to help manage construction projects. Mr. Till SECONDED the motion. Motion carried.***

Ms. Botzjorns said that Saint Michael's College has a sister group in Haiti and that the college has put out a call to all Chittenden County schools that they are in need of hosts for Haitian families.

The meeting was adjourned to executive session for a student issue and negotiations at 8:55 p.m. Mr. Peterson recused himself from the negotiations portion of the executive session.

Respectfully submitted,
Chris Preston

Unofficial until approved